

Washington, DC - Marking the second anniversary of congressional passage of the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Reps. Linda Sánchez (D-CA) and Hilda L. Solis (D-CA) today slammed the Bush administration's broken trade policy.

Brown also today met with Dr. Otton Solís, a 2006 presidential candidate in Costa Rica and former member of the Costa Rican Legislative Assembly. Solís ran on an anti-CAFTA platform, ending in a virtual tie with former President Óscar Arias, prompting a manual recount which Arias won.

"As an impending referendum on CAFTA approaches in Costa Rica, Dr. Solis today offered a strong critique of this trade model and its detrimental effect on his country," Senator Brown added "The demand for fair trade is an international priority."

"CAFTA is part of the Bush Administration's flawed trade policy in which corporations are the winners, not the people. I commend Otton Solís for his leadership on this critical issue and urge Costa Ricans to vote against CAFTA's implementation," said Congresswoman Hilda L. Solis (D-CA). "Because of the absence of strong labor protections, CAFTA allows Central American nations to continue its exploitation of workers. Our trade policy should lift people out of poverty, not keep them there."

"The problem with CAFTA is that it is not about trade. CAFTA is mainly about countries sacrificing sovereignty to place power in the hands of large corporations. It is an agreement that ignores the interests of small businesses and consumers both in Costa Rica and in the United States. The word protectionism has been misused when it comes to treaties like CAFTA. The weakest are the ones who should be protected and here we are in CAFTA protecting large multinationals, Hollywood DVDs and drug companies," said Dr. Otton Solís.

A referendum on CAFTA is schedule to be held in Costa Rica on October 7.

Two years ago, the House of Representatives pushed through an expansion of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to five Central American countries and the Dominican Republic, despite widespread opposition in the U.S. and abroad. Brown, Solis, and Sánchez led a bipartisan, bicameral coalition, the largest ever formed, in opposition. On July 28, 2005, Republican House leaders kept the vote for CAFTA open in the middle of the night until reaching a narrow majority, passing 217-215.

"Voters in November spoke out against the job-killing trade pacts and fundamentally-flawed trade policy of the last decade," Senator Brown said "The current trade policy in Washington protects multinational corporations and big drug companies while it exploits workers and hurts U.S. business. Our current trade system is not sustainable. We want trade and plenty of it - but under new rules."

"CAFTA has produced a two-year record of economic failure and social inequality," said Congresswoman Sánchez, a Member of the House Committee on Education and Labor. "It is time to scrap bad trade deals built on the failed NAFTA model and create a trade policy that

helps working families in the U.S. and in all partner nations. CAFTA is now entering the 'terrible two's.' Don't expect us to celebrate."

This fall, Congress is expected to debate proposed free trade agreements with Peru, Panama, Colombia, and South Korea based largely on the NAFTA model. Last month, the president's Trade Promotion Authority, part of the so-called 'Fast Track' process, expired, effectively restoring Congress' constitutional authority over trade policy-making.

Brown emphasized the need for future trade agreements to have enforceable labor, environmental, and anti-counterfeiting standards, as well as safeguards against currency manipulation. "Congress is already hard at work building a better trade policy, and as we debate these new agreements this fall, I look forward to changing our country's approach to trade," Senator Brown concluded.